

Lent 5

John 12:20-32

Seeing Jesus

In the world's most visited museum, the Louvre, along the banks of the Seine in Paris, nearly 10 million people shuffle through the doors every year. People come to see sculptures of antiquity, as well as artwork of modernity, within the colossal exhibit. There is one piece, though, that seems to grab the most attention: The Mona Lisa. Almost everyone has heard of it, and it's touted as one of the must-see pieces of art in existence.

I wonder if, during this time, people had felt somewhat similar about Jesus. This event took place during Holy Week. This is after the time when Jesus had a monumental moment of stardom when he had rolled into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The city was swollen with visitors for the Passover, and crowds clamored to welcome Jesus.

It would have probably been a little odd if you hadn't heard about Jesus of Nazareth during that week. News of him had spread to all different kinds of people across the city, so much so that even some Greeks wanted to see him. **“Now, there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.”** Of course, they didn't want just to see him; there was plenty of opportunity to look at him. They wanted a chance to engage and to speak with him.

I suppose this isn't entirely out of the ordinary for Christ. Throughout his ministry, Jesus had stints of fame, as well as small groups who had sought out to see him. In the region of Galilee, he had people crowding around houses where he was and following his moves around the shores of the Sea. Across the land of Israel, there would come teachers of the Law and Pharisees, who searched out to be able to see this man. In Jerusalem, there was a crowd of people who lined the streets to see the entrance of him.

They wanted to see Jesus. But what was it they wanted to see? Many of those people who clamored to see Jesus had something that they were looking for in him. Thousands of people across Galilee peeked above shoulders because they wanted to see a miracle: A sick girl healed from her ailments, a demon-possessed man made well, and a leper cleansed. Many Pharisees came to see Jesus to find out if he agreed with them or to condemn him for his heresy. Many Jews in Jerusalem bugged through to get a glimpse of what they thought would be their new physical King.

I think we understand this. And as much as we fight the temptation, we will clamor to Christ with our own things we hope to find. It's easy to seek Jesus and hope to find the answer to all of life's physical problems. I want to see him act; I want to see him in the healing of my chronic illness; I wish to see him as he, with a simple wave, whisks my financial burdens away; I want to see him as he cures my loneliness. We budge through

to him, just in an effort to have ammo to prove that I am right. I want to see him manifest in this world in this country. I want to see him right the political ship and make a kingdom here that will be much easier for me. We want to see Jesus.

If we return to the Louvre, there is a problem with the popularity. The interest has led millions of people in the century since its display to traverse the Louvre and whirl past statues and paintings to reach the “Mona Lisa.” Only to be disappointed. Disappointed by its size, it’s not very big. It’s quality; it is a rather average Renaissance style. Or it’s setting the swarm of people surrounding it. Many assume that because of its reputation that, it will somehow be a transcendental experience. That it will be so good you will have to be moved by it. And for many, it’s not.

Jesus was no stranger to disappointment by the crowds. After all, you look at his track record. Those thousands in Galilee tended to trickle away. The Pharisees were angry opponents of what they found. By the end of Holy Week, most of those Jews who had sung his praises had since moved on to other endeavors. Apparently, he was not what they wanted to see.

If we come to Christ, hoping to see him in those ways that we desire for him to be shown. We will likely suffer some disappointment. After all, Jesus' purpose in this world is not to heal us from our physical problems it’s not to be a cheerleader for our arguments; it’s not to set up an earthly kingdom in this country or anywhere for that matter.

Why? Because Jesus came to be seen in the way we need, not how we want. Look back at our text: **“Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip, in turn, told Jesus. Jesus replied, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds... what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.”**

The Greeks come to see Jesus, and he doesn’t even answer them, but what he does is point to what is essential. They want to see Jesus, and Jesus wants them to see something in him. Jesus wants them to see that the entirety of human history has led to this all-important time. It is the time hour that brings glory. Jesus wants them to see something that looks rather pitiful to the world; it is his impending death.

Jesus has always, has only been concerned about one thing that human beings see. It is his crucifixion. Jesus says see me, see me, the Son of God upon the tree. See me, shedding my blood. See me as I breathe my last and give up my spirit. That is why I have come. I have come so you can see me in my singular death.

And that death is so crucial because that death brings life for all who believe. Jesus says: **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”** By his death, by the cross, humankind will be saved. By his death, innocent and undeserved, eternal damnation is gone. By the death of a single seed, life is given to humankind, both now and eternally.

That is what it means to truly see Jesus. As we approach Holy Week, see Jesus. See him as he needs to be seen. See Jesus as he suffers physical pain. See Jesus, as your sins are laid on his shoulders and paid for. See Jesus, as he bears up under hell itself, separated from God the Father. See Jesus as the single kernel that dies and, through its death, brings life eternal.

The Mona Lisa will continue to be very well visited, and many will continue to be disappointed in what they see. You Christian, see Jesus in the way he wants, the way you need to see him. See Jesus as the one who died on the cross, and there, in his death, paid for your sins and the sins of the whole world. The Son of God dying on the cross that is what Jesus wants you to see. Amen.